

## THE ILLNESS OF HANGING ON

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In recent days I have become aware of an “illness” that lingers within all of us. The illness is frightening in that it doesn’t look or feel like an illness. As a matter of fact, it is such a part of who we are, it seems normal and we often are surprised when others do not “get it”. The “illness of hanging on” involves all the shoulds, have tos’, ought tos’, and rules we have for others and for how our life “needs” to be. I am talking about has to do with assumptions and beliefs we have developed from many different experiences in our lives. Assumptions include what we believe about life, what we believe about ourselves, and what is required of us in life. These assumptions or beliefs are not always so far off base. There is much truth in some of the beliefs or assumptions of what “should” be, that we have. What we assume is played out in our relationships with those who are in our closest circle of family and friends. When we openly discuss our ideas of reality in a safe atmosphere, we can learn a lot about what is real in another person’s experience. Their assumptions about life may be very different than what we think. When we put our assumptions in the open we can learn about what is real about another person’s experience and our impact on them and their impact on us. There may be truth in both persons’ assumptions. However, this is not my main point. People hang onto their assumptions out of fear that they will lose something. The damage in relationships can be and at times, is heart-breaking. Hanging onto one’s idea of how things should be becomes a trap that includes a cycle of demands, discouragement, judgments, shaming, and contempt, which leads to death either within the heart, the spirit or the relationship.

When I see this kind of illness in people, it reminds me of how much we (I include myself in this) do not believe that God is who He says He is...our Father. A father who has gone to the extent that he allowed the death of His only child to prove how much He loves us, and desires to have us “hang on” to Him first. He loved Saul enough to knock him off his horse and blind him in order to get his attention. Samson was blinded for not facing his own distorted beliefs about himself and the source of his strength. Even Peter was painfully confronted with his ideas of himself and what he would or would not do. The truth is, God is the only one who can love us the way we need to be loved. He is the definer of life, of us, and of what is required of us.

I wish I could say there was an easy way out of this “illness’. There is no easy way to let go. Those assumptions we have hung onto protected us at times and gave us direction. Not all of them are bad yet there are aspects of these beliefs that God is in the business of modifying for the glory of His Kingdom and for your healing. Letting go of what “should be” involves sadness. It involves facing the distorted aspects of our thinking. It involves a change in our basic belief system about what we think we deserve/need and the sufficiency of Christ. Letting go of the “shoulds” involves changes in how we act toward others. It means repentance. It means honesty in the inward parts. And...it takes time. All I know is that God is the one to hang onto. If not for His mercy, which endures forever, there would be no hope, for we deserve nothing.

II Corinthians 13:4 states, "Though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. *For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God.*" (Emphasis mine) The "illness of hanging on" can only be healed by facing the truth about our self, admitting the beliefs we demand to have fulfilled, allow the gradual letting go and moving into the "with Him" of His love, His presence and power as our Father. Without letting go of the "hanging on", the illness is terminal.

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